

PHILIP MILLER (1943 -)

This poet has been a mainstay of the Kansas City poetry scene, where he co-founded the Riverfront Reading Series. He served on the editorial boards of *Woodley*, *Potpourri*, and *BookMark* Presses and on the boards of The Kansas City Artists Coalition and The Kansas City Writers Place. He co-edited (with Carl Bettis) the magazine *The Same* (2000-2007), for which he is the current editor. He is also contributing editor to the online magazine, *Big City Lit*. After retiring, he moved to Mount Union, Penn. His poetry is chock-full of surprising language and philosophical twists.



"Like a Tree" is a poem I have tried to write many times, without this poet's success. Miller compares his body at length to a tree with the idea that human organic forms are like other natural forms—hair is like "leaves"; digits are like "twigs"; and lungs have bronchial alveoli like "sponges." This breaks down the separation of body and mind, expounded in the philosophy of René Descartes. Miller posits reality as a unified field, where thought is a natural process, like gravity. Humans and trees both are mortal and eventually will fall.

The poem shifts into high gear with the description of the head, which includes "inner petals" where he connects "what our brains conceive" to the physical voice. The poet's words are organic constructions, "unwrapped and uttered by way of bone and blood."

LIKE A TREE

**The body owns us, lets us, inside it, live
 and breathe through branchy sponges it provides:
 the head covered with hairs like leaves,
 the trunk's limbs sprouted
 with fingers and toes like twigs,
 and within, the heartwood's dark thuds
 are the ax man's steps, which will bring it down,
 this body with a head like a bloom,
 and with inner petals, too, delicately tissued
 purses and pods of sap and seed,
 and the Adam's apple, the vocal chords and tongue
 give us a voice which is the body's voice,
 full-throated, words of the flesh,
 unwrapped and uttered by way of bone and blood.
 Only by the always-bodily thing are we
 brought to what our brains conceive
 before the body falls like a tree.**

Education: Philip Miller attended public schools in Kansas City, Kansas. He received a B.A. (English and Psychology 1965) and M.A. (English 1966) Emporia State University.

Career: This poet taught English at Kansas City Kansas Community College (1986-2002). His books are: *Cats in the House*, Woodley Memorial Press, 1987; *Hard Freeze*, BookMark Press, 1994; *From the Temperate Zone* (with Keith Denniston) Potpourri Press, 1995; *Branches Snapping*, Helicon Nine Editions, 2003; *Why We Love Our Cats and Dogs* (with Patricia Lawson) Unholy Day Press, 2004; *The Casablanca Fan*, Unholy Day Press (forthcoming). He won the Ledge Press chapbook award (1995).